

## **Community Formation in Australian Mining Towns, 1880 to 1980**

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In the context of the rapid development of new resource communities in the current global mining boom in Australia and elsewhere, it is timely to reflect on a century of community formation in resource rich countries. This paper is based on extensive research on five major mining towns in Australia, complemented by extensive field work and local interviews. It offers an historical overview of community formation in selected mining regions.

Such mining towns developed as distinctive urban and cultural formations. In the period after 1880, when mining became more heavily capitalised and carried out by joint stock companies, communities of wage earners and their families developed on the fringes of large ore bodies. While smaller finds led to temporary camps or short lived towns that formed and disappeared within the space of a few years, on the resource-rich Australian continent, large permanent towns were established to service major finds at Broken Hill (New South Wales), Mount Morgan (Queensland), Queenstown (Tasmania), Mount Isa (Queensland) and Kambalda (Western Australia).

This paper charts the development of these five permanent towns, and the changing nature of community formation. It draws links between the financial and labour process of the mining industry and the new community but also considers other factors – patterns of immigration, the regional context, new labour management strategies and the civic and organisational elements of local life. The legacy of these patterns of community formation were generations of deeply etched memories, together with the tangible heritage of mining communities embodied in an urban environment, pit top structures and mills. With an increasingly mobile fly in-fly out (FIFO) workforce being deployed to work new mineral finds, the next century of mining will not create distinctive urban environments in Australia or elsewhere. The paper concludes by considering the future of these communities as their ore bodies are depleted, or as an increasingly common FIFO workforce threatens town sustainability.